VOICE Country Sheet

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Vulnerable road users in Hungary

VOICE

VOICE : Vulnerable Road User Organisations in cooperation across Europe

VOICE is a network to ensure that usually neglected VOICEs are heard in the transport debate – those of vulnerable road users.

The VOICE coalition currently consists of:
AGE - the European Older People's Platform; ANEC - the European consumer voice in standardisation; Health and Environment Alliance; European Child Safety Alliance; European Disability Forum; European Public Health Alliance; European Federation for Transport and Environment; Voetgangersbeweging - Pedestrian Movement, BEUC; European Transport Safety Council

More information: www.etsc.be/Voice.php

Part I - Hungary

Introduction

Road safety in Hungary could be regarded as a success story in the 1990s. According to available figures, the number of road deaths dropped by 50% between 1990 and 2000.[1] However, in recent years progress seems to have stalled. This is mainly due to a general lack of compliance by traffic participants with basic traffic and safety rules, with some 80% of all accidents resulting from these violations.[2]

The vehicle fleet in Hungary has grown from 2.5 million a decade ago to 3.14 million now.[3] Safety improvements, however, have not kept up with this incremental trend. Hungary seems to suffer from a lack of political will to tackle road safety problems. There is also insufficient coordination of road safety measures combined with low levels of enforcement and road safety campaigns. These factors contribute to making Hungary one of the least safe countries in the former EU-25 – 127 road deaths per million inhabitants and 38 deaths per 100,000 vehicles.[4]

Alcohol

Although driving under the influence of alcohol is strictly prohibited by law (BAC limit is 0) and is part of the penalty point system, approximately 12-14% of accidents resulting in personal injuries are caused by drunken drivers,[5] and roughly 9% of all traffic deaths are alcohol-related.[6] Since 2001, the number of accidents caused by drink driving has been on the rise despite some strengthening of enforcement measures in 2002-2004.[7]

Random police checks of drivers are legally allowed in Hungary. In case of an accident, blood and urine samples can be taken at the hospital if the driver has been injured, or during autopsy if he or she is dead.[8]

Alcohol is also a serious problem among cyclists, with 13.5% of them riding under the influence of alcohol. There seems to be a problem with BAC registration in accidents as the rate of cyclists whose alcohol impairment is unknown is extremely high: 42.2%.[9] It is clear that alcohol abuse affects not only drivers but pedestrians and cyclists as well and this problem should be addressed as soon as possible by means of stricter enforcement and public awareness campaigns.

Speed

Inside built-up areas, speed has been reduced from 60 to 50 km/h in 1993. This led to a reduction in the number of fatalities at first but after 1995 data shows that effect fading away as the number of deaths increased again.[10]

Outside built-up areas, speed limits were raised in 2001 (from 80 to 90 km/h on rural and country roads, from 100 to 110 km/h on semi motorways, and from 120 km/h to 130 km/h on motorways leading to higher average speeds, more deaths and general deterioration of road safety. According to many professionals, this step was introduced at a bad time from the transport safety perspective. The police did not have the personnel and material required for an increased number of checks, the penalty point scoring system did not sanction speeding severely, the vehicle fleet was still obsolete, and the drivers' behaviour was not up to the required standard. Furthermore, the raising of the speed limit was not accompanied by appropriate campaigns.[11]



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Automated speed control cameras have recently made their appearance on some sectors of the M1 and M7 motorways, and their number is increasing. However, the number of radar speed meters used by the police is still low compared to the volume of traffic.[12] An efficient use of fully automated systems will be possible only when the legal framework has been adapted.[13]

Pedestrians and other vulnerable road users

According to Hungarian legislation, pedestrians have priority at pedestrian crossings. Yet, a considerable number of accidents involving pedestrians occur at pedestrian crossings.[14] More specifically, about 80% of accidents are the result of disregard for safety rules.



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A significant number of accidents involving cyclists is caused by inappropriate driving techniques. Cyclists are also to blame as they often disrespect basic traffic rules and many of them are ignorant about the Highway Code requirements. This reflects the lack of appropriate information among the general public regarding traffic safety as well as the low levels of enforcement of traffic rules.

Hungary dedicates part of the National Education Programme to road safety education. A major weakness is that traffic education is very often not a part of vocational training for teachers and Kindergarten staff.

Enforcement

Despite the strengthening of the traffic law enforcement measures by the police, it remains unsatisfactory compared to other EU countries.[15] Apart from speeding and drink-driving, the other most frequent offences are widespread use of mobile phones while driving, low rate of seatbelt use and disregard for direction indicators in urban areas.[16]

Penalty point system was introduced in 2001 for traffic offences, with a maximum of 18 points, but its effectiveness is undermined by insufficient capacity for continuous police control[17] and by the low number of demerit points in the beginning (originally only one point was given for all kinds of offences). SInce then, however, the system has been improved, and the number of points has been increased in accordance with the severity of the offence.

The levels of police staff and equipment remain insufficient.[18] The other factors which impede safety improvements are: lack of coordination of road safety measures; improvised rule making; and low police budget for road safety initiatives. It is not clear which ministry holds overall responsibility for road safety in the country.[19]

Infrastructure

A considerable amount of walkers are killed or injured on urban roads, in the zones with limited access for motorised traffic, and on rural roads with no pavement. The infrastructure and its environment should therefore be clear and comprehensible to all road users, especially drivers, since they travel at higher speeds and have to read the design and traffic situation more quickly.[20]

In rural areas, the lack of proper infrastructure for vulnerable road users (VRUs) is worrying. It is not surprising then that pedestrians are most exposed to road risks outside built-up areas. As already pointed out in the previous section, a considerable proportion of accidents occur at pedestrian crossings. This calls for giving utmost priority to the treatment of crossings and other essential infrastructure measures suitable to VRUs.



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Part II - What works best? Examples from Europe.

Measures targeting both drivers and vulnerable road users are necessary in order to improve behaviour and enhance road safety in Hungary. Addressing common traffic violations by drivers such as drink driving and speeding has proven effective in a number of countries. The examples below illustrate what other European countries have done to address similar issues.

Speed

Some countries in Europe have imposed a speed limit of 30 km/h as well as traffic calming measures in many residential and school areas. In **Belgium**, the cities of Gent, Mons, Kortrijk and Antwerp have developed large "Zone 30" areas and all the areas around schools have been made "Zone 30" as of 1 September 2005. In France, "Zone 30" areas are developing in most city centres. In **Slovenia**, the systematic implementation of "Zone 30" in residential areas is taking shape. In **Cyprus**, traffic calming measures (mainly road humps) have been introduced in the recent years: these measures were implemented mainly outside schools but also on trunk roads through villages and at locations where high speeds coupled with the crossing of vulnerable road users.[21]

A few countries in particular have achieved tangible results in reducing speed and casualties. In **Denmark**, the EMIL project showed that traffic calming can lead to speed reductions of 5-40 per cent with an average reduction of 10

km/h.[22] In the **Netherlands**, 30km/h zones generated a 22% reduction in personal injury crashes.[23] In **France**, improved speed management, based on the new camera system, contributed about 75% to the massive overall reduction in fatal accidents by 35% between 2002 and 2005.

Alcohol

In the **Netherlands**, drink driving tests have been on the rise since the introduction of the "Speed Teams" between 2000 and 2003, and the number of detected violations has increased sharply. In 2004, 25,000 minor offences were dealt with by the Dutch Central Judicial Collecting Agency, representing a more than 50% increase from 2003 when it was nearly 12,500. The stepped-up enforcement goes hand in hand with Belgian-modelled 'BOB' designated driver campaign introduced in 2001. As a result, drink driving on weekend nights has dropped to 3.9% in 2003, and alcohol-related traffic deaths make up no more than 17% of the total.

In **Austria**, new legislation was introduced in 2005 to enable roadside screening tests in drink driving enforcement. A pilot project led by the Austrian Road Safety Board (KfV) has shown that the use of screening devices can help multiply controls by ten without increasing human resources. According to KfV, the efficient implementation of these devices could save between 50 and 100 lives annually. The new instruments should therefore be applied in every roadside check.[24]

Infrastructure

The pedestrian plan developed by the municipality of Geneva in **Switzerland** contains a programme of measures aimed at promoting walking as a transport mode in the urban environment. More specifically, the main objectives are to encourage walking, improve public spaces, facilitate pedestrian traffic, eliminate obstacles for pedestrians, and keep traffic in proportion with the size of neighbourhoods. This has resulted in the construction of more than one hundred new pedestrian crossings and numerous enlargements of sidewalks and modifications to crossroads.[25]

Copenhagen in **Denmark** has invested heavily in cycling lanes, public transport (including better transfer between public transport modes), reduced the environmental impact and safety hazard of motorised traffic by diverting it away from the city centre and local streets and introduced a 40km/h speed limit in residential areas, amongst other measures.[26]

Enforcement

Penalty point systems are increasingly used in European countries. Addressing common traffic violations by drivers such as drink driving and speeding has proven effective in a number of countries.[27] A driving licence penalty point system in order to penalise drivers who speed coupled with increased enforcement has reduced road fatalities in **France** by 17% between 2002 and 2003. In **Italy**, road deaths fell by 30% during the first year following the implementation



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of a penalty point system. However, experience has shown that it is crucially important to keep up the profile of the penalty point system with police controls and campaigns well after it has been introduced in order to ensure that the momentum is not lost.[28]

Road safety education

Education and campaigns to raise awareness of road and traffic risks amongst pedestrians and cyclists have been implemented in many EU countries. Some countries have specific curricula and timetables for road safety education at school with a view to providing children with essential information on how to behave as pedestrians, cyclists and, in certain cases, future drivers. **Malta**, for example, has created interactive games for children and has organised school visits by safety professionals. In **France**, a certificate of first education to road safety is given at school and is required before beginning the training in a driving school. Educating children from an early age with a view to making them more responsible road users in adult life has obvious benefits. **Slovenia**, like Hungary, is a new EU member state but with much lower children accident rates.[29] The Slovenian Road Safety Council organises campaigns promoting pedestrian safety. At the beginning of the school year it performs actions for schools in every town called "Safe Way to School".

Part III - All actors contributing

The examples of what has worked in various locations illustrate mainly what national and local authorities can do to improve the protection of vulnerable road users. But national and European decision makers also have a role to play.

At a national level the government must ensure the frameworks they establish for more local action support and stimulate the spread of initiatives that have been successful. In Hungary, the areas that specifically need to be strengthened are stricter enforcement measures to counter road accidents, as well as better coordinated infrastructure improvement campaigns and continued efforts to educate all road users.

Measures to protect vulnerable road users at EU level

In 2001, the Commission proposed an ambitious target to halve the number of road fatalities by 2010 (**White Paper on the European Policy for Transports, 2001**). In order to pave the way towards achieving this target, the Commission subsequently published a **European Road Safety Action Programme** (**COM (2003) 311 final**). It stressed the need for better protection of vulnerable road users. In particular, it highlighted the relevance of education and awareness campaigns aimed at vulnerable road users and the importance of the tests conducted by EuroNCAP (European New Car Assessment Programme) regarding passive safety, which concerns protection against injury in the event of a crash.

Safer car fronts for pedestrians and cyclists are a priority to EU action. Mindful of the fact that every year some 8,000 pedestrians and cyclists are killed and a further 300,000 injured on European roads, the Parliament and Council adopted a **Directive** (**2003/102/EC**) which aims to reduce the severity of injuries to pedestrians by laying down tests and to introduce changes to the front of vehicles, concentrating essentially on the bonnet and bumper. These could help prevent up to 2,000 pedestrian fatalities a year. European, Japanese and Korean car manufacturers had already agreed to produce vehicles complying with the provisions of the first step of this Directive as well as a range of other safety measures, which will reduce the risk of serious or fatal injuries to pedestrians. The second stage of this Directive has been reviewed and the Commission will propose a revised standard, this time a Regulation, which will adapt the standard to ensure its feasibility between 2007 and 2009. The final standard eventually adopted by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament must give the protection of vulnerable road users the highest priority.



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Hungarian campaigns and organisations

The **Ministry of Economy and Transport** (*http://en.gkm.gov.hu*) and the **Ministry of Interior** (*www.bm.hu*) are the lead government agencies responsible for road safety. The State Secretaries of Transport and Interior co-chair the I**nterministerial Committee (IMC) on Road Safety** and share leadership responsibilities with the **National Police** (*www.orfk.hu*) in the **National Accident Prevention Committee (OBB)**. A small **Road Safety Department** in the Ministry of Economy and Transport supports the IMC with administrative tasks.

The **Transport Science Institute (KTI)** (***www.kti.hu)*** is a non-profit institute under the Ministry of Economy and Transport and is in charge of the analysis of accidents and accident research amongst other activities. The **Hungarian Traffic Safety Association** is one of the few civil society organisations focused specifically on road safety; **GRSP (Global Road Safety Partnership) Hungary** (*www.grsproadsafety.org*) was officially registered in August 2005 as an independent association; the **Hungarian Bicycle Association (*www.kerosz.hu)*** is a cyclists interest group; the **Hungarian Automobile Club** (*www.autoklub.hu*) and the **Hungarian Red Cross** (***www.icrc.org/eng)*** are both active at the local level.

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